

## Every Smile You Fake by nessonmain

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**Summary:** For just a moment, he feels Will's hand brush against his back like he's going to hold him back, but then the touch leaves and Will's stuffing his hands into his pockets. He doesn't make a move to get out of Mike's hold, though, so Mike'll count it as a win as he ignores how his chest tightens. (or, Mike's thoughts about Will during season two.) byler/byeler. discontinued

## 1. peer over the edge, can you see me?

Anonymous asked: Can u do a fic, that just basically crocuses on Mike's thoughts during season 2, like he kinda knew he had feelings for will already?

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10-29-84

Will's gone.

Will's gone, and Mike's heart feels like it's about to pound straight out of his chest. It's a little embarrassing, really, getting so worked up at such a little thing, but the last time Will was gone, he nearly died, so Mike thinks he has the right to worry at least a little. He tries his best to not baby him, because Will's not weak – he's probably stronger than the rest of them, having gone through a full week of hell alone and coming out on top. But, when Will just disappears without a word, Mike can't help remembering last November. He manages to slip out of the conversation with Keith, which was growing increasingly uncomfortable anyways, and he tries to tell himself that Will's just gone off to play another game, but even after multiple checks down every isle, there's still no sign of him. *Okay, so maybe he's in the bathroom*, he thinks, trying to push down the panic that's rising into his throat. But, of course, nothing there, either. Just his luck.

Okay, he'll admit it, he's kind of starting to freak out.

In the midst of his panic, he finds himself walking towards the front doors of the arcade. He doesn't really understand *why*, because it's not like Will's going to just leave entirely – oh, wait, scratch that, he sees Will. He's just... standing there? He's staring at something just past the sign for the arcade, but as far as Mike can see, there's nothing out of the ordinary. *Oh, whatever*, he thinks, pushing the door open.

"Will!" Mike's voice isn't loud by any means, but you'd think he'd screamed with the way Will whirls his head to look at him, eyes wide with fear. The look he's wearing isn't new by any means – Mike's seen it many times throughout the years, though it has definitely grown

more common since the whole Upside Down incident – but Mike's breath catches in his throat nonetheless. He does his best to keep his voice from shaking and asks, "Are you okay?" It comes out a little bit breathless, but at least it doesn't crack halfway through the sentence like it has been lately.

Will turns back to the sky, and he starts shifting his weight from one foot to another just the way he always does when he's nervous. "Yeah, I just..." He's backing up now, confusion evident in his voice. "I needed some air." And while Mike really does want to know just what's going on inside Will's head, he trusts that Will will be able to reach out when he needs help. He's pretty sure he's made it clear that he's here for Will no matter what. He knows not to push.

Instead, he walks over to Will and slings his arm over his friend's shoulders. Mike's grown a little taller, and now Will slots perfectly under Mike's arm, but even before his growth spurt, having an arm around Will always felt like it fit just right. Being pressed up against Will has felt right ever since they were little, but Mike had never really paid much attention to it until a few years back. Since then, he's noticed his face gets warm when they're together that he never gets around the others, and after last year, he'd felt something similar around Eleven, but what he felt around Will was so much more intense. There's a constant thought swirling in the back of his head, and deep down he *knows* why his chest feels fluttery around Will, but he pushes it back, because he's only ever heard of boys liking other boys in the form of slurred curses from Will's so-called father and muttered words from his own at the dinner table. (His mom always gives his dad a warning glare, so Mike doesn't think she quite agrees with him (then again, his parents rarely ever agree on things), and Mike almost exclusively agrees with his mom over his dad, so he's really not sure what to think.)

He desperately fights down the blush threatening to rise on his face, especially because *now is not the time, Mike!* "Come on, you're up on Dig Dug," he says, and turns the two of them around, walking back into the arcade. For just a moment, he feels Will's hand brush against his back like he's going to hold him back, but then the touch leaves and Will's stuffing his hands into his pockets. He doesn't make a move to get out of Mike's hold, though, so Mike'll count it as a win as he

ignores how his chest tightens. "Let's take back that top score, huh?"

## 10-30-84

Mike can see Will's face fall as soon as the principal says his name. He leaves, shoulders hunched, and they watch Will walk to the car. "You guys think he's okay?" Dustin asks, voice quiet and tender. He's usually loud without realizing it, but it's at times like this that he makes an effort to keep his voice low. Mike's not sure he'll ever get used to it.

Lucas' tone matches Dustin's when he answers, "He's always weird when he has to go in," and it feels just a little less weird hearing it from his weird (though, it still doesn't feel *right*).

"I don't know. He's quiet today." Mike doesn't look away from where Will's getting into his car. He's well aware that Will hates visiting the lab – Will had said so himself. He had told Mike that he hates being singled out, that he wanted to be treated like he's strong (and Mike can't help but feel like anyone who thinks Will's weak after what he went through needs to actually think about it, because it's *so obvious* to him and he can't comprehend how you could see Will as anything but strong), and the checkups really don't help with that at all. The doctor tries to treat him like a kid, and while that might have helped if Will were younger, he's thirteen, so it just ends up feeling like he's being seen as even *more* of a baby.

Mike can hear Lucas say from behind him, "He's always quiet," but he doesn't try to respond. Instead, he's watching the car drive off, and he can feel his lips twist up sourly. There's a bitter taste in his mouth and a pang of sadness in his chest, and in the back of his mind he thinks that maybe this means something, maybe he should think about *why* he feels like this. He brushes it off, though, because this is just a normal friend thing; he *doesn't* like boys, he *doesn't* like Will. He can't.

(He could. He might. It's probably not a normal friend thing, he knows that, but he's not going to say anything. Ever. Because boys aren't supposed to like other boys – not in Hawkins.)

**i don't usually do multichapter fics so hopefully i can finish this!**

requests are taken via tumblr [william-bylers](#) (or you can just come chat)

## 2. don't get caught alone, oh no

10-31-84

Logically, Mike knows he shouldn't have done that. He's found himself getting so, so angry this year, but he's been trying to separate it from his friends, because they're rarely the root of the problem. But he couldn't help it this time; he doesn't want to hang out with Max, doesn't want her to join the party (he doesn't trust people that weren't there, they don't understand, *she* won't understand), and it kind of feels like the others are trying to replace El and he wonders if this is how Lucas felt last year. And so, he took it out on Will and stalked away to go catch up with the others.

Just like always, that comes back to bite him in the ass.

The first call of his name is quiet, and he almost thinks that he'd imagined it, but then he hears it again, and again, and it's Will's voice calling for him, it's *Will*; his mind starts racing and he turns on his heel, jogging back out to the street where he left Will, but there's a pack of kids walking down the sidewalk and Mike can't see if Will's there or not. Then, he spots a hint of beige in the corner of his eye, and he looks over just in time to see Will running through the crowd, clearly panicking. He doesn't even apologize to everyone he bumps into, which is so not Will-like that Mike can't help but curse and take off after him when Will darts past him without a glance. He can hear Dustin, Lucas, and Max shouting in worried tones as Mike passes them, and he's not shocked to hear thundering footsteps join in behind him as they followed him. He doesn't have time to acknowledge them, though, because then Will disappears around a corner and Mike pushes himself to run faster.

When he reaches Will, he's curled up behind a wall and breathing heavily, eyes shut tightly. Mike quickly reaches out and grabs him, and Will jolts with a shout when Mike's hand grips his shoulder. Mike starts talking, not listening to the words he's saying as he watches Will look around with wide eyes. He can hear Dustin yelling as he runs down the steps, and three pairs of footsteps slow behind him.

"Is he okay?" Lucas asks, and Mike spares a glance over his shoulder

to see Dustin and Lucas standing there, Max slowing to a stop next to them, concerned expressions on their faces.

"I don't know," his voice is high with worry, and he looks back to Will. "I'm gonna get you come, okay? I'm gonna get you home. Hold on." Will's staring at him, owl-eyed, and his eyes are just the slightest bit vacant, like he's not all here. Mike's chest hurts at the whimpers falling from his lips, and he stands, pulling Will up with him. He doesn't mean to snap at Dustin – he knows he's just trying to help – but he can't quite keep the bitterness at the whole situation from bubbling over (though he feels a little guilty thinking back on the hurt in Dustin's voice afterwards). He walks off, arm still over Will's shoulders, and he manages to coax Will into leaning most of his weight on him, not that Will weighs much in the first place.

Walking with Will in silence is both weird and the most comfortable Mike's felt in weeks. Honestly, he doesn't have a clue what happened, but he knows that if he thinks too hard about it, he'll end up unnecessarily angry all over again. So, he focuses on the warmth of Will still under his arm, and he definitely does *not* focus on the warmth trying to bloom over his cheeks, nor on the pounding of his heartbeat, or the tightness of his chest, or the way a voice in the back of his mind is chanting *oh my god, oh my god, oh my god*, because that's not important right now, Mike, *stop it*.

He was so busy trying not to think about it (and subsequently thinking far too much about it) that he wasn't paying attention to where he was going. His feet had automatically brought him home, and Will hadn't mentioned it, so he can only assume it's fine with him. He brings Will into the basement and nudges him toward the couch, and he dumps out his bag of candy over the table as Will slides off his proton pack and gently sets it on the couch, sitting down with a weary sigh.

Mike tosses his proton pack next to Will's and he pauses, thinking. *What now?* Should he get Will a drink? He remembers spraining his ankle at age nine, when his mom gave him some hot chocolate to distract him from the ice on his ankle, and it had filled his chest with a warmth that he doesn't think has ever gone away since. Yeah, hot chocolate sounds like the perfect thing right now.

"I'll be right back," He motions for Will to wait and scurries up the stairs, passing his mom, who makes a confused noise, without a word of explanation. The only mug that sits clean on the shelves is a happy birthday mug, and while there's some lesser used plain mugs on the shelf furthest up, he's not quite tall enough to reach them and he *really* doesn't feel like climbing onto the counter right now, so he settles for the nowhere near seasonally appropriate birthday mug and hopes Will won't pay attention to it. He curses when he realizes he has no clue where the hot chocolate packets are kept, and he's in the middle of scouring the cupboards for them when he gets interrupted by a voice.

"Mike, what are you doing?" He glances over to see his mother standing in the doorway, brows furrowed and a frown on her face.

Mike turns back to the cupboard, rummaging through as he replies, "Making hot chocolate. Will doesn't feel good." He speaks in blunt words, matching the tone that he's been taking with her more and more throughout the year. He's just... stopped caring so much. She doesn't understand, she never will, and he knows it. Growing up, he always thought she'd protect him from anything, she'd keep him safe, but that illusion was shattered when Will went missing. He doesn't care anymore.

She walks over to him and crouches down, moving snacks aside so she can reach into the far back of the cupboard and pull out the box of hot chocolate packets. She moves to grab the kettle, filling it with water, and Mike assumes that means she's going to make it for him, so he sits down at the table instead. Silence takes over as his mom bustles around the kitchen, until, *finally*, she sets down the mug in front of him.

"Tell him I hope he feels better, alright?" She says with a soft, if ever so slightly strained, smile. The vaguely noticeable wrinkles in her face almost seem to disappear, and Mike swears it's the youngest she's looked in years.

"Thanks, Mom," He gives her a quick side hug before scurrying off downstairs.

There's more candy on the table than when he'd left, and Will's



munching leisurely on a mini chocolate bar. Mike shoves the candy around to make an empty spot, a few candies falling onto the floor in the process; he gingerly sets the mug on the table and sinks down next to Will. (He makes sure there are a few inches between them. If they're too close, he might start to get *ideas*.)

Will murmurs a quiet *thank you* and picks up the cup. Mike can see it shake in his grip as he sips at it slowly. They sit in a comfortable silence, and Mike finds his eyes drawn to the way Will's throat moves as he swallows despite trying to look anywhere else. He's quick to avert his gaze whenever Will glances over at him, but he can feel the heat creeping into his cheeks even when he's not looking at him, and he has to bite down on his lip to keep himself from slipping and telling Will that he's pretty. It's a relief when Will sets down the now empty mug on the table. Will looks infinitely better now than when they'd gotten back, and Mike doesn't want to break the (beautiful) look of peace on his face, but he knows it needs to be said.

He takes a deep breath. "Will, what's going on?"

Will opens his eyes, and, with a shuddering breath, he starts to talk.

After a very worrying explanation filled with hand gestures, Will asks him not to tell the others, because they wouldn't understand. Mike *gets that*. He knows Dustin and Lucas are trying, but they tend to pretend things are alright until they get too out of hand to ignore anymore. Plus, they're currently kind of fighting over a new kid, who knows literally nothing about the situation. So, yeah, Mike's very much okay with not telling them. But... hearing that, he can't help but say it.

"Eleven would."

"She would?"

Mike nods sadly – even thinking about her hurts, because she's his friend, she's *their* friend, and she could be out there, all alone, maybe even in danger, but it feels like everyone's given up on even trying to find her. He doesn't know how they managed to give up on her when she saved their lives, but it's just- it's hard for him to grasp. He's been told he cares too deeply, he tends to throw himself into relationships

and ends up far too attached far too quickly. That's probably *why* he feels like this, but it still hurts nonetheless.

"Yeah," he glances over to Will for a split second, turning away when the expression on his face makes his heart twist up in an awkward combination of care and hurt. "She always did."

He's not sure if he should say this next bit. For all he knows, Will might just brush it off like the others would, but that doesn't feel like something Will would do. *Screw it*, he thinks. "Sometimes I feel like I still see her," he looks at Will again, but he's not looking back, so Mike sets his gaze on a Mr. Goodbar sitting on the table instead. "Like she's still around, but... she never is. I don't know. Sometimes I feel like I'm going crazy." He finishes with a small shake of his head and a bitter smile on his face.

There's a pause, and then Will's saying, "Me too." Mike didn't expect that – he's not sure *what* he expected, really, but it certainly wasn't that. He can feel the smile on his face start to become more genuine than before, and he turns to face Will without a clue of what to say. But, then, the words seem to flood his head, and he knows they're the right ones.

"Hey, well, if we're both going crazy, then we'll go crazy together, right?" He can't seem to tear his eyes away from Will's face, and all that's going through his head is a constant chant of *please say yes, please say yes*.

Will nods, and Mike watches as a smile stretches across his cheeks. Their eyes meet as Will huffs out a laugh, and he's tearing up now. Maybe that means this means as much to him as it does to Mike. "Yeah. Crazy together." They break eye contact, but Mike's thoughts stay locked on Will.

Mike's still not sure what exactly is happening right now, but now he knows Will's going to be there with him through it all, and vice versa. It doesn't matter what happens, because they'll always be Mike and Will, Will and Mike. That's the way it's been since kindergarten. That's the way it'll stay. Mike doesn't care what bullshit the world throws at them next; they'll go through it together, they won't be alone. His chest feels warmer, and he wonders if it'll stay just like the

hot chocolate from four years ago. *Crazy together*. It's the best thing he's heard in months.

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**i don't know why this took so long! (i do know why. it was christmas)**

**hopefully next chapter won't take as long? but who knows lmao**

**i hope you all had happy holidays!**

### 3. hurry boy, it's waiting there for you

11-01-84

The second he had seen the creature inside Dustin's proton pack, Mike knew things were about to utterly go to shit.

First of all, its name is d'Artagnan – because *of course* it is, it's *Dustin* – and that's not really a name that strikes him as trustworthy. Secondly, it felt cold and slimy in his hand, and it was hard not to cringe at the feeling – *again*, not something that he thinks is a good thing. Also, it's nothing any of them have ever seen before – Dustin says he thinks it's a new species – and having an unknown, slimy creature right in front of him had sparked a feeling in his gut that *it's happening again*. But, he'd went with it; Dustin was really excited about it, and Mike didn't have any actual proof of it being bad, so he'd held off on ruining Dustin's fun until he had a real reason to.

That reason comes to him in the form of Will Byers.

"Will, you coming?" He asks after school, ignoring all the other students shoving past him in a hurry to leave. "Let's go show Mr. Clarke."

Will doesn't say anything; he just shuts his locker and looks at Mike with that look on his face that says *something's up*. "What?" Mike questions as Will steps over to him, and repeats himself when there's no response.

Will leans in just the slightest bit with wide eyes, and murmurs, "It's about d'Artagnan."

*Oh shit.*

Mike glances around them, making sure nobody's looking at them before quickly reaching out and grabbing Will by the wrist, pulling him over to a relatively empty spot of the hallway so they're not standing in the way of anyone. He huddles in close to Will and, dutifully ignoring the fuzzy feeling in his chest, motions for him to continue.

"Okay, but don't get- don't get mad at me, alright?" Mike can feel concern rising quickly, but nods slowly. It doesn't appear to relieve Will in any way, because he keeps staring into Mike's eyes with a look of quiet fear on his face. The air seems to grow thin around them as Will drops his voice to a whisper. "After I got back from the Up- from *there*, I started... well, coughing up things."

"Things? Like, like what?" Mike prompts when Will doesn't continue, his lips twisted downward.

"They were kind of like slugs, I guess. But, they- *they looked like Dart.*" The words come out hurried, like he's not sure how Mike's going to take it, or maybe he's not sure he'd be able to say it otherwise.

Mike feels his heart drop into his stomach. He *knew* there was something wrong with that thing.

"Tell me everything."

And Will does. He tells Mike in hushed tones about how Dart looks *so, so similar* to the slug, just with an added tail, he tells Mike about how he'd heard an unsettling chittering noise during his episode yesterday that sounded just like the noises Dart made. Mike won't even *try* to deny that there's panic squeezing his heart in its grip; Dustin's going to show Mr. Clarke something that, more likely than not, is from the Upside Down.

"Oh *god*, okay, um- let's go get the others!" There's an urgency in his tone that he didn't plan on as he reaches up and pats Will's shoulder without thinking twice, and cringes immediately afterwards, stiffly dropping his arm back to his side. He waits for Will to nod, and, after nodding back, takes off for Mr. Clarke's classroom, hearing Will's footsteps following quickly behind him. Luckily, they're just on time, because when he bursts through the door with a shout, the proton pack is sitting on Mr. Clarke's desk. Mike does his best to come up with a good excuse for Mr. Clarke – though he can tell by his face that it's not very convincing – and scoops up the proton pack, backing out of the classroom with a yell that spurs the others into following him, although it does kind of hurt his throat. He makes sure Max stays outside the AV room; she doesn't know anything about the Upside Down, and he wants to keep it that way, both because he

doesn't trust her and because it would put her in *their* line of sight, and he's not going to put her through that even if he doesn't like her that much.

And then, they talk.

Mike does most of the talking for Will, really. He knows talking about it's probably really hard – god knows *he* doesn't like talking about last November – and Will had already told it once, so Mike might as well make it easier on him. And, soon enough, he says the thing that's been dancing around in the back of his mind throughout the school day: "Dart is from the Upside Down."

He can see Dustin's expression fall, and dimly feels a little guilty at having to do this, but at the same time, he's thinking *come on, Dustin*.

Lucas sighs, and for a split second, Mike thinks he's going to disagree, but then he continues with, "We have to take him to Hopper."

"I agree."

"No. No way. If we take him to Hopper, Dart's as good as dead." Dustin protests, because of course he does, because Dustin wants this *so bad*, and Mike remembers that he's not the only one who throws himself into things. Mike can kind of relate to this, and he feels bad, but at the same time, he knows Dustin's in the wrong here, he's trying to protect something that could and would eagerly kill all of them, so Mike can push away the guilt pretty easily.

"Maybe he should be dead!" It's the truth, and Mike doesn't regret saying it, but the hurt that flashes across Dustin's face makes him think that he *maybe* could have worded that better.

"How can you say that?"

Mike's patience is starting to wear thin. "How could you *not*? He's from the Upside Down!"

"*Maybe*," Dustin retorts, "but even if he is, it doesn't automatically mean that he's bad."

...Wait, *what? Really?* "That's like saying just because someone's from

the Death Star doesn't make them bad."

Dustin looks away from him, trying to shield his expression from Mike's vision – it doesn't work; Mike can see every hint of pain in his face, and he *hates* that he put it there, but more than that he hates that Dustin's so broken up about *Dart*, of all things. He says softly, "We have a bond."

*Oh my god.* Honestly, what the hell is Dustin thinking? That's the most ridiculous thing Mike's heard in months! "A *bond*? Just because he likes nougat?" He can feel a smile settle on his face, and there's a hint of laughter in his voice, because it's just so damn *stupid* it ends up feeling like a joke.

"No, because he trusts me!" Dustin shouts, turning to stare Mike in the eyes. He can't help but deflate a little at the look in Dustin's eyes – there's fear, desperation, hurt, anger, and it shakes Mike to the core because this is a side of Dustin he's only seen maybe four or five times. It never comes up without a good reason. It's obvious he's invested now more than ever; if he's acting like this, there's no way Mike'll be able to pull him back to his senses on his own.

But Mike's not on his own. "He trusts you?" While it's technically a question, Lucas' tone makes it clear he's not actually interested. He's looking at Dustin with a single eyebrow quirked, and it's such an utterly *Lucas* expression that, in a better situation, Mike would have to bite back a fond smile.

"Yes! I promised that I would take care of hi-" Just as Dustin's about to finish, Dart screeches from inside the proton pack, and the pack starts jerking violently. They all back away from the table, ignoring the banging on the door and Max's muffled calls. Dart tips the pack over onto its side, and Mike instinctively grabs at the nearest blunt object on the table, not even registering what he's holding. "Don't hurt him!"

Mike keeps his gaze set firmly on the proton pack, not looking up at Dustin as he replies, "Only if he attacks."

"Just open it already," Lucas snaps at Dustin. He reaches over, grabbing the remote, and pauses before opening the doors. Dart

tumbles out, bigger, greener, and with two more limbs than before.

"Holy shit," Lucas says, and Dustin drops the remote quickly. There's a pulse on Dart's side, and Mike wonders for a split second what the hell it's going to do now before- *oh god, oh shit*, make that four more limbs. Dustin looks like he's about to barf, and Lucas screeches out, "Oh, *shit!*"

*Okay, fuck this.* Mike steps forward and swings down, but Dustin's shouting and pushing Mike's arm roughly. He hits the table with an unsatisfying *clonk*, but Dart's fallen off the table and is skittering towards the door. The door swings open, Max on the other side. Dart runs past her, and Mike thinks he hears her murmur something along the lines of *what the*, but that doesn't matter. "Oh shit!" He spits, and all four of them scramble to get outside. Dustin somehow brings both himself and Max to the ground, Lucas tripping over them. Mike steps around them to look down the corridor.

Both Dustin and Lucas ask where Dart went, but Mike can't see any sign of him. Max, picking herself off the ground, asks, "What was that?"

"Dart!"

"What?"

"You let him escape!" His words come out snippier than intended, but he doesn't care enough to correct them, nor does he have the time.

Dustin shoves a finger into Mike's chest. "Why did you attack him?" It's strange – Dustin's been mad at him plenty of times, considering Mike's quite good at angering people when he wants to (and when he doesn't want to, too), but he's pretty sure this is the first time Dustin has been really, truly angry at him. It kind of tears at his chest that the first time had to be over a creature from another dimension. Speaking of which, he needs to find that thing as soon as possible. God knows what it might end up doing if they let it run free. So, he pushes past Dustin, mutters a quick *come on*, and takes off down the hall.

He ignores the way face twists as Dustin yells at him angrily, "Don't



hurt him! Don't you hurt him!" It's okay. He's okay.

Somehow, it takes them ten minutes to find Dart. And by them, Mike means Will, because Mike ended up getting kind of... distracted. First, it was Max circling him over and over, and then, who he *thought* had been El, but apparently, he was wrong. Either way, Will says that Dart's in the bathroom near Salerno's, so Mike and Max (who ends up sticking with him, both because she doesn't have a radio and because she's still trying to get in the party) make their way there, meeting up with Lucas along the way. When they get there, Dustin's standing there empty handed. No sign of Dart.

"Where's Dart?" He asks, because Dustin has a better chance of knowing than any of them do.

Dustin, however, just shrugs, "I don't know. Not here." His voice is a little cold, and, *okay*, maybe Mike deserves it, just a bit.

"What?" Mike moves to check the stalls for any sign of the little bastard.

Max speaks from behind him. "He said by Salerno's, right?"

"Yeah. Maybe Will has him," Dustin responds, and Mike feels like the temperature drops 10 degrees when he realizes it.

He looks right at Dustin. "Where is Will?"

Dustin's eyebrows scrunched together. "He wasn't here when I got here."

*Oh, shit.*

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hey it's 2018! that's pretty cool

anyway this one took less time than expected

going to write the mike & max scene but i just,, couldn't figure out how to do it,, it just never turned out right. sorry if you wanted that :/

**i also made a poll for what i should do for the snow ball! here's a link,, please vote - [www . strawpoll . me / 14724577](http://www.strawpoll.me/14724577)**

## 4. there's bones in my closet

11-01-84

"Okay, new plan. Find Will first, and if he doesn't have Dart, then we can keep looking for Dart afterwards. Yeah?" Mike comes up with a plan, because otherwise he'll start freaking out, and wouldn't that be the icing on the cake. He waits for the three of them to nod in agreement. "Then, *let's go!*"

After what feels like hours of searching through the halls, he still hasn't seen a sign of Will. He figures, *ah, screw it*, and goes to check outside. He kind of doubts Will would just go outside, but, hey, it could happen. There's a blob of colour on the field, and as Mike draws nearer, he can see that it's Will. He's just standing, unmoving, and Mike is vividly reminded of a few days ago at the arcade. That had been an episode, so maybe this is too?

He calls out Will's name, but Will doesn't react. That's strange. The other times he's found Will in the middle of an episode (though he hadn't known it at the time), he'd snapped him out of it with his voice. Trying to think of anything else that might work, he settles a hand on Will's shoulder. No response.

Will's eyes are rolled back behind his eyelids, and he seems to be almost- almost looking around rapidly? Is something *bad* happening in the Upside Down? (Who is he kidding, of course there is. It's the Upside Down.) The sight hurts his heart, thinking about it hurts his head, so he does the only thing he can think to do: he starts shaking Will by the shoulder, calling his name over, and over, and *over, over, over*. He doesn't get anything out of it other than increasing panic, but he keeps doing it anyways, because it's the only thing he *can* do.

Then, in the corner of his eye, there's movement. He whips toward it, and it's Lucas; he's running towards them, but then Mike yells, "Lucas, get the others!" He switches directions almost instantly, running back into the school, and Mike turns back to Will, returning to his mantra of Will, Will, *Will*. Quickly, very quickly, there's four (four?) people running over – Lucas, Dustin, Max, and Mrs. Byers.

Mike takes a moment to wonder how Mrs. Byers knew to come here. He's glad she is – she probably knows how to handle this far better than him. "I just found him like this!" He shouts at them, "I think he's having another episode."

Mrs. Byers rushes forth, crying out Will's name as she clutches his shoulders. She's speaking to him, but Mike can't make out what she's saying over the blood rushing through his head. He's not sure he even wants to hear her. He's known her almost as long as he's known Will, and he'd be lying if he said she's not like a second mom to him. Listening to her panicked words would probably make him freak out even more. Mike just stands there, feeling more useless than ever as Mrs. Byers grows more and more frantic. Will's eyes are moving around even faster behind his eyelids, and it's actually one of the scariest things Mike's ever seen (behind the Demogorgon itself, that is). Something's wrong, *something's wrong*, and Mike can't do anything to stop it, and that shakes him to the very core.

And then, finally, Will gasps, opening his eyes, and Mike's world is clear again.

Mrs. Byers holds him close to her, and, after a moment of watching Will trying to steady his breathing while gripping his mother's arms tightly, Mike looks over to the others. Worry shone clear on each of their faces, though Max also looked *extremely* confused. She meets his eyes for a second, but it feels like hours pass. She looks almost afraid, and he's tempted to apologize for letting her get dragged into their mess. He doesn't say that, though. She'd probably end up asking him about this whole situation, and he's too scared to tell her. Telling her will get her in trouble, will get *him* in trouble. So, he breaks eye contact to stare at his shoes, and he says nothing.

Will pulls back from his mom, and she gives each of them a strained but thankful smile before ushering Will back inside. Lucas offers to run down to the AV room to grab Will's bag, and Dustin goes and finds Will's walkie talkie in the bathroom, and once both of them come back, Mrs. Byers thanks them profusely and leads her son outside.

"Okay, that totally freaked me out," Max says as they watch Will and Mrs. Byers walk over to their car. "Did that not freak you guys out?"

No one gives her an answer. Lucas, instead, says, "Two episodes in two days."

"It's getting worse." Mike continues where Lucas had left off.

"You think it's True Sight?" Lucas asks, and Mike turns to tell him *yeah, it's the best guess we've got right now*, but Max speaks first before he can, asking what True Sight is. Lucas looks over to where she stands, and Mike shakes his head subtly, because Max isn't getting even more involved if he has any say in it. Fortunately, Lucas takes the hint. because then he just says, "It's nothing."

The Byers' car drives off, and after a good minute of standing on the steps, Max sighs. "I should probably... go home." She doesn't sound thrilled.

"Yeah! Uh, me too," Dustin says quickly, almost *too* quickly. Mike glances over to him, brows furrowed. Dustin's mom never makes him come home quickly, so why would he be in a hurry to get home? Dustin notices his confusion, and explains sheepishly, "Mom wants me to help make a treat for Mews' birthday."

*Oh.* Okay. Mike could swear that the cat's birthday had already passed, but maybe he's just remembering wrong. Whatever. As they walk down to the AV room, he says, "Lucas, you wanna come over?"

Lucas nods, and once they've grabbed their backpacks, they get their bikes from the bike rack and start down the road, Max riding along on her skateboard. Mike and Lucas break off toward Mike's house, and Mike spends half an hour answering Lucas' questions. Eventually, though, they set to working on homework together in a comfortable silence, lounging on Mike's bed. Lucas has to leave for home after a few hours, his parents expecting him home for dinner. Mike's dinner is uncomfortably tense, as has become the usual, and he goes to bed early. He doesn't fall asleep. He just doesn't want to be around his parents right now.

Nancy comes in about an hour into his sulk-in-the-dark session. She's worried about him, says he was acting weird. He doesn't tell her what's going on, but he appreciates the offer. Maybe one day, he'll take her up on it, but that day is not today.

11-02-84

Will's not at school, which was kind of expected, to be honest, but it leaves this empty feeling in his chest nonetheless. During lunch, Mike gets voted out to call the Byers' house – though, in all honesty, he's pretty glad to be the one who gets to call. But, of course, there's no answer. Just his luck.

He'd thought about it during his several hour long brooding time last night, and he'd come to a conclusion. He has to tell them about the shadow monster. He knows he'd promised Will not to tell them, but they need to know. And, hell, if they don't understand, he'll *make* them understand. Mike brings Dustin and Lucas into the AV room, and runs around the room, switching on lamps and making sure the door is locked. He doesn't *need* to turn on so many lamps, but he's really just stalling so he can think of how he's going to word this. Eventually, though, he runs out of things to do, and plops himself onto the table with a sigh. Lucas and Dustin stare at him expectantly.

"Will didn't want me to tell anyone," he starts quietly, "but on Halloween night, he saw a sort of shadow in the sky."

"A shadow?" Lucas repeats. "Wh-what kind of shadow?"

"I don't know. But it scared him," Mike pauses for a moment, "and if Will really has True Sight... I mean, if he can really see into the Upside Down, maybe he saw that shadow again yesterday."

Dustin says, "So that's why he was frozen like that."

"Maybe."

"Can it hurt him?" Asked Lucas. "I mean, if this shadow thing isn't from our world..."

*Well, shit*, he'd never even considered that. "I'm not sure. Dustin?"

"Well, if you're in another plane, you can't interact with the material plane," Dustin recites, his voice sounding heavy with exhaustion, "So theoretically, no, the shadow can't hurt him."

Mike doesn't want to be the downer, but someone has to say it.

"Yeah, if that's even what's happening. This isn't D&D. This is real life."

"So what do we do?" Lucas is quiet, almost timid, and it's so, so weird to hear Lucas, someone Mike's always secretly thought of as strong, sounding vulnerable.

"We acquire more knowledge. I'll go to Will's after school. See what's going on. You guys stay here and find Dart." Mike makes plans, Mike leads, because, at this point, putting on a strong face as the so-called leader of the group is the only thing that's keeping him from breaking down.

Dustin's brow immediately furrows, which Mike *really* should have expected. "Dart? What's he gotta do with this?"

In Mike's opinion, it's pretty freaking obvious, but he *apparently* has to spell it out. "Will heard him in the Upside Down. I don't know how yet, but he's gotta be connected to all this. He's gotta be. And if we find Dart, maybe we can solve this thing. Maybe we can help Will."

The rest of the day passes by excruciatingly slowly, until finally, *finally*, he hears the final bell and rushes out of his class and to his locker as soon as he can. He dumps his supplies into his backpack and leaves, hopping onto his bike and riding quickly over to the Byers' house. Knocking on the front door of the Byers' house is something he's done a million times, but never before has he pounded on the door, still panting from the bike ride over, and called inside impatiently. No, this is all new. Luckily, Mrs. Byers opens the door quickly, and Mike doesn't have any time to start overthinking things.

"Is Will here?" He asks after they exchange soft hellos.

"You know what," she glances behind her for a second. *Suspicious*, Mike notes. "Now, now's not a really good time."

Mike interjects, because it looks like she's about to keep talking. "Is he okay?"

She pauses, and then, she's stepping outside, pushing him back from

the door. "You know, he's just not feeling real well." She puts her hand on his shoulder, and it feels weird being talked to like this – soft, kind words, trying not to hurt his feelings – by someone who's not his mom, or even Nancy. He's not sure if he likes it. "He's laying down, so I'll tell him you stopped by, okay?"

Mrs. Byers turns to go inside, and Mike thinks it's all far too suspicious; her excuses, pushing him away, not answering him directly. *She knows something*. And Mike thinks he knows what.

"It's about the shadow monster, isn't it?" She stops in her tracks, turning to look at him with wide eyes. "I know."

She slowly steps back over to him, grabs him by the shoulders, and says, "Tell me everything you know."

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wrow it's only been four days and i'm already updating? shocking!

this one is mostly filler tbh because that's just how the episode dealt it :/

also i hope yall know that literally every time someone reviews i do a little happy shriek

once again, the poll is still open if you haven't voted - [www . strawpoll . me / 14724577](http://www.strawpoll.me/14724577)



## 5. when they do, i'll be right behind you

11-02-84

Mrs. Byers lets Mike in after he explains what's happened in the past few days, and she tells him everything Will's been going through, which was extra worrying. ("*He likes it cold*," yeah, great, awesome.) Once he's inside, he can't help but marvel at the papers adorning the floor and the walls. He knew *about* it, sure, but hearing about it really didn't prepare him for... *this*. Before he can get a closer look, though, Mrs. Byers ushers him into Will's room, where Mike finds himself spluttering and averting his eyes hastily – Will's shirtless, and Mike *hates* that his stupid, teenage brain is picking now, of all times, to freak out over it. He's known Will for most of his life, goddammit, he shouldn't be getting flustered over it now, when there's very obviously something *wrong* with Will!

Fortunately, Mrs. Byers seems to pick up on his embarrassment, because then she's picking out a shirt and handing it to Will, nudging him when he hesitates to pull it on. She scoops up a few loose papers, pats Will on the shoulder, and leaves the room, shutting the door behind her. For a good minute, Will just stares at Mike silently, already starting to sweat through the shirt, and Mike fidgets under his troubled gaze. He looks over at the wall, quickly taking notice of the papers taped together messily in here, too, and he decides to follow the path wherever it goes now that he has a chance to.

"So, your mom told me about the... the stuff that's been happening." He breaks the tense silence, because he doesn't know what else to do. "But, I'm still kind of- kind of confused." That's not even a lie, really – he got the gist of it from Mrs. Byers' explanation, sure, but a lot of it's still not quite clear to him.

"Well..." Will starts, but then he stops, falling silent for a few minutes. Mike decides not to push; he knows Will will tell him when he's ready. Pushing him forward now would probably just make things worse. So, Mike just keeps following the path in silence, and he lets Will think. And, eventually, Will speaks again, voice quiet and shaking, and he sounds like he'd rather be saying anything but this, but he's saying it anyways because he *needs* to. "It's like... It's like I

*feel* what the shadow monster's feeling. See what he's seeing."

Mike had glanced between Will and the pictures as he kept tracing the path with his finger, and he settles his gaze on Will fully as he asks, "Like in the Upside Down?"

Will nods his head just the slightest bit, almost imperceptible from where Mike's standing. "Some of him is there. But some of him is here, too."

*Here?* Mike looks around, almost as if the shadow monster's just going to be sitting in the corner of the room, waving a shadowy tendril at him. Of course, he *knows* it's not there, logically, but still. "Here, like, in this house?"

"In this house, and-" Will's face twists up, and it looks like he's about to start crying – Mike's seen this look too many times to count. It still pulls at his chest every time. "-in me." Mike moves over to the bed, sitting down next to Will as he tries to provide any bit of comfort he can. "It's like... It's like he's reaching into Hawkins, more and more. And the more he spreads, the more connected to him I feel."

"And the more you see these now memories." Mike continues as it begins to form clearly in his head.

"At first, I just felt it in the back of my head. I didn't even really know it was there. It's like- when you have a dream, and you can't remember it unless you think *really* hard. It was like that." Mike looks away, not able to bear looking at him when he can't think of anything to say to comfort him. *C'mon, Mike, think, think, think!* "But now it's like... Now I remember. I remember all the time."

"Maybe..." Mike looks back over at Will, whose arm is shaking, "Maybe that's good."

"Good?" Will's voice is wet, strained, and incredulous, like it's the most ridiculous thing he's ever heard, and he looks at Mike for a second with tears in his eyes.

"Just think about it, Will. You're like a spy now, a super spy, spying on the shadow monster." Oh, *god*, Mike hopes he's right about this. "If

you know what he's seeing and feeling, maybe that's how we can stop him. Maybe all this is happening for a reason." He's not really sure where he got the idea – the thought popped into his head without warning, and it stuck like glue until he was saying it out loud, voice extremely soft, even to his own ears.

"You really think so?" The look in Will's eyes is screaming that he wants to believe it, wants to believe him, but he just doesn't know if he *can*.

And if Mike can do anything, it's convince Will that this is okay, that they're *okay*. "Yeah, yeah, I really do." Will eyes flit around before landing on one thing in particular, and he starts shaking anxiously. Mike follows his gaze and sees a drawing of what he assumes is the shadow monster.

"What if he figures out we're spying on him?" Will snuffles, and Mike turns back to look at him. "What if he spies back?"

"He won't." Mike rushes in, trying his best to cut off Will's train of thought before it gets nasty.

Will shakes even more as he asks, "How do you know?"

Mike lets instinct take over, reaching over and covering Will's hand in his own. Will stills, and Mike can't take his eyes off his face. It has to be the truth, *it has to be*. He hopes, he prays that he's right, and then he states, "We won't let him."

Slowly, almost excruciatingly slowly, Will relaxes, eventually slumping over onto Mike's shoulder. After a few minutes, he turns his hand over, linking their fingers delicately. Mrs. Byers comes in later, asking if Mike wants to stay the night, to which he readily agrees. Getting away from his family *and* spending time with Will? It's like a double win, he thinks. Dinner's a little awkward at first, but then a conversation sprouts and he feels like he's finally come home. It's kind of sad, really – the only place he feels completely and utterly comfortable is with a family other than his own.

He goes to sleep, wrapped tightly in a sleeping bag, feeling okay for the first time in almost a year.

11-03-84

Mike had gone to bed feeling okay, but that feeling leaves when he wakes up to Will shifting loudly in his bed. It's almost funny how easily he got distracted from all the shitty things going on around him. He contemplates shaking Will awake – it seems like he's having a nightmare, what with all the moving and whimpering – but before Mike can get up to do anything, Will's shooting up with a gasp. While his heavy breathing is slowing, Mike asks, "Will, what's wrong?"

Will looks over to him with fear in his eyes, still panting, for several moments before he finally manages to get out, "I saw Hopper... in- in my now memories. I think he's in trouble. I think he's going to die."

Oh. That's... not what Mike was expecting. He expected more from the shadow monster, but Hopper? That's a surprise. "Should we tell your mom?"

Will nods, standing up from the bed, and holds out a hand to help Mike up from the ground. Mike unwraps himself from his sleeping bag, and takes Will's hand. He almost trips on the sleeping bag, but, luckily, Will steadies him. He offers a sheepish grin and squeezes Will's hand once before letting go. He doesn't want to make it weird or anything. Will gives a small smile back, and, on trembling legs, makes his way out of the room slowly. Mike follows, grabbing his hoodie from his bag beforehand and sliding into it, zipping it up partway because *damn*, it's cold as hell in this house.

Will tells his mom the same thing he told Mike, and she asks, panicked, if he can draw where he saw Hopper. She grabs a tube of wrapping paper, tearing off a large piece, and the two of them rush into Will's room, Mike following, feeling like a useless duckling. Will sits at his desk, picks up his crayons and starts colouring frantically as soon as Mrs. Byers sets the paper in front of him. Will stops abruptly, and Mike can hear thunder rumbling faintly. It almost feels like a warning.

Mike peers around Will to see the scribbled blues and blacks on the paper, not really paying attention to what they're saying as he tries to memorize the shape as best as he can. He might not be the best person to have along in this scenario – he's not very strong, and he

can't even lead the rest of the party when they're not with him – but the least he can do is help look for Hopper. As soon as Mrs. Byers picks up the wrapping paper, he starts scouring every inch of the house that's covered by paper alongside her.

He finds it on the fridge, a spot where four paths merge together. Mrs. Byers runs over after he calls her, and holds up the paper to see that it matches. She says, "Okay, so- so Hopper is here?"

"Yeah. Now we just need to find out where *here* is, right?" Mike does his best to reassure her – she's always gotten stressed so easily, even more since last year, and Mike really needs her to stay calm.

"Right."

"Did he say anything? I mean, before he left?" He asks, because they'll need as many clues as possible if they're ever going to find Hopper.

She sighs, gesturing uncertainly with one hand. "Some- something about... vines?"

Mike *wants* to keep on this train of thought, he wants to start brainstorming about where the hell there would be vines, but then there's the sound of a car. His first thought is *what if that's Hopper, what if he's alright after all*, and it seems Mrs. Byers thinks the same thing, because as they walk to the windows, she breathes out, "Hopper."

It's not Hopper.

It's Bob.

Mike's only met Bob maybe two or three times, and he seemed... nice. Nothing super out of the ordinary, but if that's what Mrs. Byers wants, he can't really say anything about it. Mrs. Byers goes out to talk to him, and Mike gets distracted by Will creeping into the room behind him. He smiles softly at Will before the door opens again, and Mrs. Byers is letting Bob in- letting him in? Is she *insane*? But, there's nothing he can do about it – this isn't a democracy, this is her decision. (Doesn't mean he has to be happy about it.)

Mrs. Byers gives Bob the vaguest possible explanation, and Mike

swaps a wary glance with Will. She calls Bob over to the crossroads on the fridge, and he hands Mike the pile of things he's holding before following. Mike plops the things onto the table and pads over to them as Mrs. Byers draws an X with a red crayon in the center of the crossroads.

"That's the objective. Find the X," Mike supplies.

"Yeah? What's at the X, pirate treasure?" Bob chuckles, and *god*, he's such a typical adult. He doesn't believe them. Mike knew this would happen.

Joyce interrupts sternly with, "Bob, no questions."

"Okay," He whispers.

There's an awkward silence for a moment, and Mike almost wants to say something, but there's nothing *to* say. Then, Bob pulls Mrs. Byers out of the room, saying, "Let me talk to you for a second. Hang on, guys."

Mike and Will look at each other at first, lost, before Mike slowly walks over to the table. He sits down quietly, and Will waits a second before coming to sit next to him. They sit in silence until Bob's voice starts getting louder, clearer, as he and Mrs. Byers come back into the hallway.

"Okay, I get it, that's Lake Jordan. And if that's Lake Jordan, then you can probably find..." They're all the way down the hallway now, and Bob snaps his fingers, pointing at the wall, "Yeah, that's, uh... Sattler's quarry. And then if you just follow it naturally, it leads to the Eno river. And there it is! That's the Eno, do you see it?" He looks back at Mrs. Byers, who tilts her head, trying to see it, and Mike is actually kind of stunned. Maybe Bob's actually the right person to have with them.

"Okay, so, the lines aren't roads, but they *act* like roads," Bob continues, walking into the kitchen. "And they act like roads 'cause when you follow 'em, you'll see... they don't go over water. And that's the giveaway. That's the giveaway!" He laughs triumphantly, and Mike twists in his seat to watch as Bob walks behind him. "Don't you

get it? It's not a puzzle. It's a *map*. It's a map of Hawkins!"

Mike looks at Will, who stares back with wide eyes full of shock. Bob laughs again, and Mike turns back to him. He looks towards Will, and asks, "Right, Will?"

Will looks up at him blankly, nodding awkwardly after a few moments of silence. And then. they think.

Eventually, Mrs. Byers comes up with a plan: label all the bodies of water, measure it on a map of Hawkins, and measure it in the house. She goes to dig out a ruler, map, and tape measure, and Will brings a pad of paper and crayons from his room so he and Mike can make labels. Bob lists out all the areas that need labels, and tapes up the papers after they're done. They're done before Mrs. Byers comes back, and Bob busies himself with writing on the back of the now empty pad of paper. She comes back with what they need, handing the ruler and map to Bob. Mike grabs one end of the tape measure, and Bob asks them to get from Lovers' Lake to Tippecanoe, so they measure from her room to the living room.

Then, they measure from Tippecanoe to Danford Creek, and Mrs. Byers insists that that has to be enough. Bob says it's not, the ratio isn't one to one, but says that the X is probably half a mile southeast of Danford. Mrs. Byers kisses him on the cheek, thanking him before grabbing the map and running out of the house. Will sends Mike a quick surprised glance before the two leave after her. Mike can hear Bob call from behind them, "What? Are we- we really going?"

No one answers him.

The drive feels like it takes hours. He *knows* it probably only takes ten minutes, but once they get into the farmlands it's like an endless landscape of grass. Mike waits, watches, and *waits*, before he finally gives up. "There's nothing. There's nothing here."

"A-are we close?" Mrs. Byers asks Bob from the driver's seat.

"We're in the vicinity," He answers after a moment's pause.

She sighs, "What's that *mean*, the vicinity?"

"It means we're- we're close, I mean, I don't know, it's not precise."

"But we did all that work!"

"I told you, the scale ratio is not exactly one to one. We needed to take more mea-"

"Turn right!" Will bursts in while Bob's mid-sentence, voice loud and urgent, calling Mike's attention over to him.

Mrs. Byers twists her head to look at Will. "What?"

"I saw him."

"Where?" She cranes her neck, scanning the fields outside the windshield for any sign of Hopper, but Mike's pretty sure that's not what he meant.

"Not here, in my now memories."

Mrs. Byers looks back at him one more time, and Bob looks back too, asking, "In your *what?*"

*Whoops.* Mike probably should've stopped Will from saying that. Oh well, he figures, just another detail Bob knows. It's not like they told him *everything*. Apparently, Will could care less about explaining to Bob right now, because then he insists, "Turn right!"

And turn right she does. She veers off the road entirely, and things immediately go to shit as they smash through a sign (*pick your own pumpkins*, Mike thinks it said) and a hay bale, Mrs. Byers quickly losing control of the car. Mike can't help but yell as the car bumps violently, and the car's filled with screams before they just barely manage to stop before hitting Hopper's police cruiser. Mike chokes for a second thanks to his seatbelt as they're all thrown forward from the abrupt stop.

"Are you okay?" Mrs. Byers asks breathily, looking back at them, and Mike knows she's talking more to Will than him. (It's okay. He doesn't blame her.)

Will looks shaken, hair all mussed up, but Mike doesn't really care;



just then, the way he just *knew* where Hopper was, it was almost like he was a- "Super spy..." Mike murmurs. Maybe he was right after all.

"What's Jim doing here? Joyce?" Bob asks her, but she doesn't respond, instead looking back at Mike and Will.

"Boys," She says, popping open the car door, "I need you to stay here."

As she's getting out of the car, Will leans forward, gripping onto the driver's seat. "No, Mom, Mom, Mom, it's not safe."

Bob gets out of the car, too, as Mrs. Byers replies, "That's why I need you to stay here. Stay here!" She slams the door, and Mike flinches back from the loud noise instinctively. Mike watches as Bob and Mrs. Byers disappear down below the ground. He looks over at Will wordlessly, and Will stares back. His eyes are swimming with fear, and Mike's heart twists at the sight. C'mon Mike, he thinks, now's not the time for your crush – not a crush! – to get in the way. They could be in *danger*, he can't just sit here and do nothing while they're down there, possibly walking into their deaths.

Mike takes a sharp breath in, and breaks the silence, still staring into Will's eyes. "I'm going out there." It's a statement, but he's pretty sure that Will can hear the question behind it: *are you coming with me?* Will's eyes flick over Mike's face – it feels weird, like he's being exposed in every way possible – before nodding slowly, but decisively.

Their car doors slam shut at the same time.

His resolve quickly fizzles out as he approaches the hole (*vines* covering it, of course there are vines), and it seems Will's going through the same thing, because they both walk slower, slower, and stop. "Do you see anything?" Mike asks, because, well, it can't hurt to ask. "I mean, in your now memories?"

But Will shakes his head, swaying on his feet nervously. Well, *shit*, there's one plan down the hole. Mike's pondering whether he should just suck it up and go in when there's the sound of engines and tires screeching. They whirl around, and Mike can only watch as three vans from Hawkins lab pull into the field. He has to repeat to himself

that they're on his side, they're on his side, because the last time he saw those vans was when he was biking for his life last year. Not exactly his favourite memory. Will looks at him, he looks at Will, they're both illuminated by the headlights and there's nothing they can say.

Several people step out of the vans, pulling on hazmat suits quickly. One man in a coat looks at them, and he asks, "What're you two boys doing here?"

And all of a sudden, all eyes are on them. Well, all eyes are on *Mike*, because he can feel Will looking to him, and Mike knows he has to say *something*. "There- there's people down there!" He manages to stammer out.

There's an explosion of noise around them, one person heading down past the vines almost immediately, and Mike almost loses himself in all the chatter. He steps closer to the hole, more comfortable now that there's actual experts here to handle the situation, but then Will's grunting in pain, collapsing to the ground while clutching at his stomach. Mike drops to kneel next to him, grabbing onto Will's arm as he tries to keep him still. "Will! Will, you okay?" Will keeps squirming under his hands, whimpering, moaning, crying, louder and louder. "*Will!* Will, what's wrong?"

Then, Will flips onto his back, and he *screams*.

Mike practically flies off of him and steps back; Will's screaming, jerking, eyes rolled up, and it *doesn't stop*. If Mike knows what he thinks he knows, this is probably a seizure. Mike might know that, sure, but what he doesn't know is what *caused* it, and that's all that he can think about as he watches Will convulse on the ground, looking almost like he's not himself. (He looks like *Will*, but more like a lifeless version of him. No, no, that's not right, Mike's seen a lifeless Will before. It's more like he's soulless.)

Mike has no idea what's wrong with Will, what happened, and that's almost scarier than the sight of Will seizing on the ground, mouth wide open as he shrieks. *Almost*.

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hhh sorry this one took so long ive been distracted lately

longest chapter yet though! wait times are probably going to start getting longer as the chapters get longer too :/ sorry

ty ty for reading this far lmao i love all of you